

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An automated calling system, for allowing an operator to place a series of telephone calls to a plurality of customers, wherein the operator uses a telephony device to communicate with customers, the calling system comprising:

a switching device connected to a public switched telephone network, wherein the switching device is configured to selectively connect the operator's telephony device to one of a plurality of telephone lines; and

a processor coupled to and controlling the switching device, wherein the processor is configured to automatically place a first telephone call to a first customer using a first telephone line, and to cause the switching device to connect the operator's telephony device to the first telephone line, in response to an operator's command selecting the first customer, wherein the processor is configured to automatically place a second telephone call to a second customer using a second telephone line, and to cause the switching device to connect the operator's telephony device to the second telephone line, in response to an operator's command selecting the second customer, and wherein the operator can listen as the calls are placed so that the operator can immediately talk to a customer if the customer answers a call.

2. The system of claim 1, further comprising an audio device configured to record and play audio recordings, wherein the processor is configured to cause the switching device to connect the audio device to a telephone line and to cause the audio device to play a pre-recorded audio message over the telephone line.

3. The system of claim 2, wherein the operator can record an audio message on the audio device using the operator's telephony device.

4. The system of claim 2, wherein the processor is configured so that, in response to an operator command, the processor will cause the audio device to play a pre-recorded audio message over a first telephone line at the same time that a telephone call is placed to a customer over a second telephone line such that the operator can speak with the customer over the second
5 telephone line at the same time the pre-recorded audio message is played over the first telephone line.

5. The system of claim 2, wherein the processor and audio device are configured so that if the operator commands a pre-recorded audio message to be played over a telephone line to a customer's answering service, the pre-recorded audio message is not played until a greeting generated by the customer's answering service has ended.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein processor is configured to place a telephone call to the operator's telephony device over the public switched telephone network, and wherein the switching device is configured to connect the operator's telephony device to selected ones of the plurality of telephone lines using the public switched telephone network.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the switching device and the operator's telephony device are connected to a network, and wherein the switching device is configured to connect

the operator's telephony device to selected ones of the plurality of telephone lines via the network.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein the processor is connected to a network, and wherein operator commands are relayed to the processor over the network.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the processor is configured to receive operator commands in the form of electronic signals issued by an operator's computer.

10. A method for allowing an operator to conduct a series of customer telephone calls using a calling system, wherein the operator communicates with customers using an operator telephony device that is selectively connected to a plurality of telephone lines of a public switched telephone network, the method comprising:

5 automatically placing a first telephone call to a first customer over a first telephone line, and connecting the operator's telephony device to the first telephone line so that the operator can immediately talk to the first customer if the first customer answers, in response to an operator command selecting the first customer;

10 automatically placing a second telephone call to a second customer over a second telephone line, and connecting the operator's telephony device to the second telephone line so that the operator can immediately talk to the second customer if the second customer answers, in response to an operator command selecting the second customer; and

playing a pre-recorded audio message over the first telephone line at the same time
the second telephone call is placed so that the pre-recorded audio message is played over the
15 first telephone line at the same time the operator is talking with the second customer over the
second telephone line.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising the step of recording an audio
message using the operator's telephony device.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein the operator commands are executed by having
the operator use a pointing device connected to an operator's computer.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein an operator's command selecting a customer
comprises selecting the customer from a customer list displayed on the operator's computer
using the pointing device connected to the computer.

14. The method of claim 10, wherein the step of playing a pre-recorded audio
message over the first telephone line comprises playing the pre-recorded audio message to a
customer's answering service.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the pre-recorded message is played to the
customer's answering service only after a greeting generated by the customer's answering service
has ended.

16. The method of claim 10, wherein the step of connecting the operator's telephony device to the first telephone line comprises placing a telephone call to the operator's telephony device over a public switched telephone network.

17. The method of claim 10, wherein the operator's telephony device is connected to a network, and wherein the step of connecting the operator's telephony device to a first telephone line comprises connecting the telephony device to the first telephone line via the network.

18. A computer readable medium storing a set of instructions for a computer based calling system connected to multiple telephone lines of a public switched telephone network, the instructions configuring the calling system to provide an operator having a telephony device with automated calling functions, wherein the instructions configure the calling system to execute a series of steps, comprising:

5 automatically calling a first customer on a first telephone line, and connecting the operator's telephony device to the first telephone line so that the operator can immediately talk to the first customer if the first customer answers the telephone call, in response to an operator command selecting the first customer;

10 automatically calling a second customer on a second telephone line, and connecting the operator's telephony device to the second telephone line so that the operator can immediately talk to the second customer if the second customer answers the telephone call, in response to an operator command selecting the second customer; and

playing a pre-recorded audio message over the first telephone line at the same time
15 the second telephone call is placed so that the operator can talk to the second customer over the
second telephone line at the same time the audio message is played on the first telephone line.

19. The computer readable medium of claim 18, wherein the instructions also
configure the calling system to allow the operator to record an audio message that will be played
over a telephone line.

20. The computer readable medium of claim 18, wherein the instructions also
configure the calling system to play the pre-recorded audio message over the first telephone line
to a customer's answering service, in response to an operator's command, and wherein the
calling system will wait for a greeting generated by the customer's answering system to end
5 before playing the audio message.

21. The computer readable medium of claim 18, wherein the instructions also
configure the calling system to receive operator instructions in the form of electronic signals
received over a network.

22. The computer readable medium of claim 18, wherein the instructions configure
the calling system to place a telephone call to the operator's telephony device over the public
switched telephone network, and wherein the instructions configure the calling system to

connect the operator's telephony device to selected ones of the plurality of telephone lines via
5 the public switched telephone network.

23. The computer readable medium of claim 18, wherein the instructions configure the calling system communicate with the operator's telephony device over a network, and wherein the instructions configure the calling system to connect the operator's telephony device to selected ones of the plurality of telephone lines via the network.

24. The computer readable medium of claim 23, wherein the network comprises the Internet.